

8000 - 3000 BCE

8000 BCE  
- 2700 BCE

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## The First Farmers and Herders

### Mesolithic Age

The Palaeolithic Age lasted more than a million years. At the end of the Palaeolithic Age, the climate grew warmer. This led to an increase in the variety of plants and animals. Hunting and gathering food now became easier. This favoured human survival. It was under such conditions that the Mesolithic Age, or Middle Stone Age, began.

In India, mesolithic remains have been found at various places, including Mysore (Mysooru) in Karnataka, and parts of western and central India.

Our knowledge about the life of mesolithic man in India has been derived mainly from three types of sources—tools, cave and rock paintings, and burials.

#### Tools

Man's main occupation remained hunting and gathering food, but his tools improved gradually. Apart from chipped stone tools, mesolithic man made smaller tools called *microliths* (*micro* means small). Microliths were usually stone blades ranging from one to five centimetres in length. Some of them were fixed on wood or bone and used as spears, saws, knives and arrows.

The new tools and weapons improved the techniques of hunting and gathering naturally found food. For instance, man could now collect honey, hunt swift-moving prey with bows and arrows, and use hooks to fish. Fish became an important item of food.

### Domestication of Plants and Animals

All processes by which plants and animals are brought under human control are together called *domestication*. Domestication began in the Mesolithic Age, when man learnt to grow crops and tame animals.

Mesolithic man discovered the food value of the seeds of certain grasses such as barley and wheat. He began to gather these for food. Seeds that fell at the time of gathering or seeds in discarded vegetable remains might have sprouted and suggested the magic link between seed and plant. Man might then have experimented by dropping seeds into the soil and found plants growing.

Man noticed that some animals often came near human habitations in search of food discarded by man. Man learnt to tame some of these animals and



Fig. 3.1 Small stone arrowheads and blades



use them for his own benefit. The dog was the first animal to be tamed. It was used during hunting and for keeping watch.

### The First Houses

Most people still lived in rock shelters and caves. However, some returned at the time of harvest to the places where they sowed seeds, and stayed on until they had used up the crop. These people made their own primitive houses. Houses were usually built in river valleys, where there was plenty of water and fertile soil for growing crops.

### Paintings

Many of the cave and rock paintings found in India belong to the Mesolithic Age. Red and white were the main colours used. Colours were made from rocks and naturally available minerals. The paintings depict various activities of mesolithic people, and tell us about mesolithic methods of hunting, fishing, collecting honey, religious worship, and so on.

It is interesting to note the close similarity between the poses depicted in such paintings and the tribal dances we see today. These were probably dances performed in rituals before the men set out for hunting.

### Burials

Remains of human burials have been found at some mesolithic sites. The dead were

buried along with offerings such as food and ornaments.

## Neolithic Age

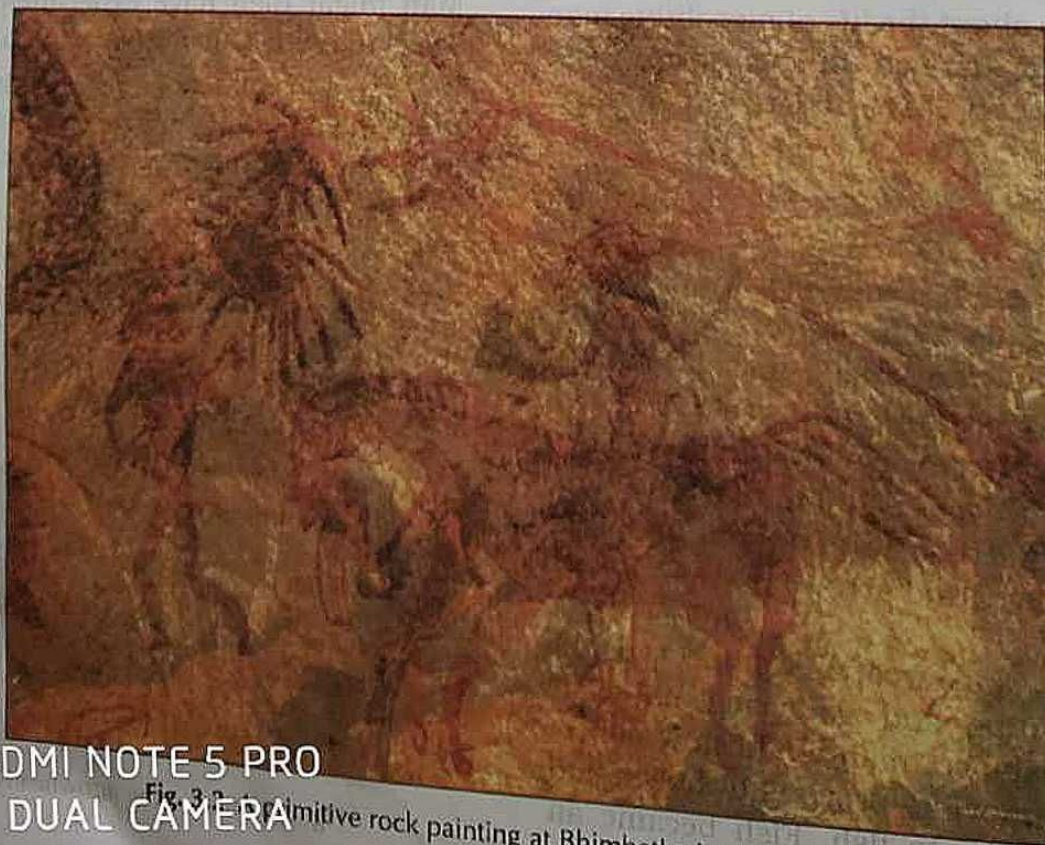
The period following the Mesolithic Age is called the Neolithic Age, or New Stone Age. Some areas in India where neolithic sites have been excavated are Kashmir, the northern Vindhyas, the middle Ganga valley, and eastern, north-eastern and southern India.

### Farming and Herding

In the Neolithic Age man changed from a food-gatherer to a food-producer. He learnt to take care of the crops he sowed and also reared animals.

We know about the crops grown by neolithic farmers from plant remains such as pollen and seeds found in soil deposits of that period. For instance, archaeologists have found remains of wheat and lentils at Chirand in Bihar and horse gram at Tekkalakota in Karnataka. The presence of charcoal in the soil at some places suggests clearing of forests by fire.

Over the years, man learnt to select, preserve and sow good-quality seeds. Thus, domesticated plants became different from and better than wild plants of the same type.



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Fig. 3.2 Primitive rock painting at Bhimbetka in central India



Neolithic man realised that mild-natured animals could be domesticated and kept alive till the need for food arose. Remains of animal bones and shelters found at neolithic sites tell us about the animals domesticated by neolithic man. For instance, a cattle pen has been found at Koldihwa in Uttar Pradesh (UP), and bones of cattle, sheep and goats, at Tekkalakota in Karnataka. There is also evidence that neolithic man used cattle in agricultural work and as means of transport.

Man allowed only the gentlest of his domestic animals, the ones with smaller teeth and horns, to breed. Thus, domesticated animals gradually became different from the wild varieties. You might have noticed, for instance, that wild goats have larger horns than domesticated goats.

**Implications** Growing crops assured man of a continuous supply of food. Although man still hunted, the rearing of animals assured him of a continuous supply of meat, milk and hides. Man could, thus, produce more food than he required. He was at last free from the continuous search for food and used his free time for developing new skills.

To take care of his crops, man needed to stay at one place for a long time. Hence, permanent human settlements began to be established and community life began to take shape.

### Polished Tools

Neolithic man used harder stones to make tools. He also polished the blades to make them sharper. He designed tools to suit his new needs, especially the need to grow crops on a large scale. Hence, axes for clearing forests, better tools for digging, and sickles for harvesting were made. Man also made spindles and bone needles. Interestingly, many neolithic designs continue to this day.

### Pot-making

For storage of surplus grains, man initially wove baskets out of wild grass, applied wet clay around the baskets and dried them in the sun. While these vessels were useful for storing dry grains, they could not be used for storing milk or water. In due course, man learnt to bake the vessels on fire. Man could now store liquids and cook food in baked clay vessels.



Fig. 3.3 Polished stone axehead

### Invention of the Wheel

The wheel was a remarkable invention of neolithic man. He might have got the idea while rolling logs of wood. Wheels improved transport and quickened the pace of development. The potter's wheel improved the process of making pots. Perhaps, the wheel was also used in spinning thread, which led to weaving. Once weaving was known, man used cotton and wool to make cloth.

### Community Life

With the advent of agriculture, man settled down permanently and began to live in villages. A neolithic village consisted of a few closely built houses surrounded by a common fence of prickly bush or mud wall.

The concept of families came into being. The families living in a neolithic village were closely related, and shared the same customs, beliefs and methods of worship. A group of such families is called a *tribe*. The customs and practices of present-day tribes living in remote regions have not changed much over the ages. By observing them,



Fig. 3.4 The earliest pots were made by applying clay on baskets.



we can draw conclusions about the lifestyle of the neolithic tribes.

The people of a neolithic village carried out activities like farming, herding, hunting, gathering and fishing in groups. The tribe jointly owned natural wealth such as land, forests, water sources, etc. Hence, there were no inequalities within the tribe in terms of wealth.

Possibly, there was division of work, depending mostly on age, wisdom and physical strength. The eldest or the strongest and ablest man was the leader. He made rules and regulations for the entire tribe.

Men had occupations such as hunting and ploughing, and grazing large herds of animals. Women took care of home and children. Women, children and old people performed light agricultural tasks like sowing and harvesting, grazing small herds and protecting crops from pests such as birds. Both, men and women possibly took part in pot-making, weaving, and making tools, weapons and ornaments.

## Religion

Neolithic man worshipped water, fire, rain and thunder as also the sun, the earth and the stars. He

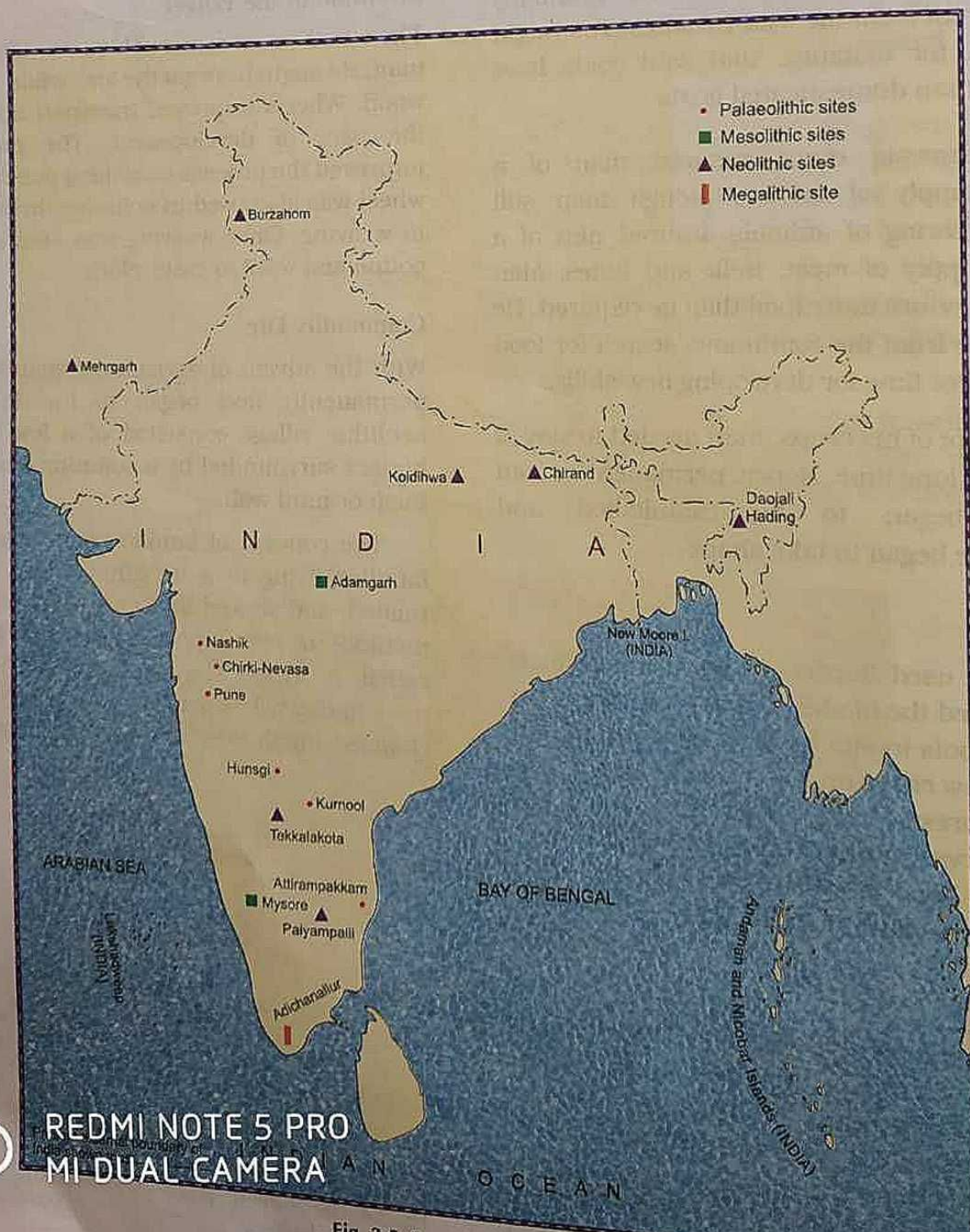


Fig. 3.5



worshipped the cow in thankfulness for the bounty it provided, and the snake in fear.

### Disposal of the Dead—Megaliths

Neolithic people buried their dead. They often marked burial places with huge rectangular blocks of stone called *megaliths* (*mega* means large). A number of megaliths have been found at sites such as Adichanallur in South India.

The dead were buried, sometimes in urns, along with objects that they used during their lifetime. This shows that neolithic man believed in life after death. Cremation was also practised.

### Neolithic Settlements in the Indian Subcontinent

Remains of several neolithic settlements such as Mehrgarh near the Bolan Pass in Pakistan, Burzahom in Jammu and Kashmir, and Daojali Hading in Assam have been found in the Indian subcontinent.

**Houses** One of the earliest village sites found in the Indian subcontinent is at Mehrgarh. The village had rectangular houses made of mud and mud bricks. Each house had several rooms. Some of the rooms were used for storing grains.

In some places like Burzahom, people lived in deep pits that had steps leading into them. Thatched roofs supported by posts probably covered the pits. Ovens, ash and charcoal have been found inside as well as outside these pits. So people living there must have cooked both indoors and outdoors.

**Farming and herding** In the Indian subcontinent, neolithic people practised hunting-gathering as well as farming and herding.

Farming was well developed at some places like Mehrgarh and Daojali Hading. The people of



Fig. 3.6 Stone and slab used for grinding

Mehrgarh grew wheat, barley and cotton, and kept cattle, sheep, goats and buffaloes. At Daojali Hading, as in many places in the north-east, land was cleared by burning forests, and cereals and yams were grown.

At some places like Burzahom, hunting-gathering was more important than farming and herding. But, the people of Burzahom did probably domesticate some animals such as dogs and goats.

**Tools** Polished stone tools such as polished axes and chisels have been found at all neolithic sites in the Indian subcontinent. At some sites like Mehrgarh and Burzahom, microliths and bone tools, too, have been found. Stones and slabs used for grinding found at many of the sites, notably Daojali Hading, were widely used in preparing food from grains and vegetables.

**Pottery** During the Neolithic Age, people at many places like Mehrgarh and Burzahom learnt to make pottery on the potter's wheel. They also painted designs on some of their pots. At some places like Daojali Hading, pots were shaped with tools wrapped in cords. These pots bear cord marks.

**Disposal of the dead** The neolithic people of the Indian subcontinent usually buried their dead. Different types of graves have been found at different places. At Mehrgarh and Burzahom, for instance, the dead were buried in pits, sometimes with domestic animals. The animals could have been meant to serve as food for the dead.

### Things to Remember

- The Mesolithic Age followed the Palaeolithic Age. In India, mesolithic sites have been found in Mysore and in western and central India.
- Mesolithic man made microliths. Some of these were fixed on wood or bone and used as spears, saws, arrows, etc.
- Mesolithic man learnt to grow crops such as barley and wheat, and to tame animals such as the dog.
- Mesolithic man painted on rocks and cave walls, and buried the dead.